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House of Representatives

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. CAPITO).

DESIGNATION OF THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
January 29, 2002.

I hereby appoint the Honorable SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Mr. Monahan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed without amendment bills of the House of the following titles:

H.R. 400. An act to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to establish the Ronald Reagan Boyhood Home National Historic Site, and for other purposes.

H.R. 1913. An act to require the valuation of nontribal interest ownership of subsurface rights within the boundaries of the Acoma Indian Reservation, and for other purposes.

H.R. 1937. An act to authorize the Secretary of the Interior to engage in certain feasibility studies of water resource projects in the State of Washington.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 23, 2002, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member except the majority leader, the minority leader or the minority whip limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. BROWN) for 5 minutes.

PRIVATIZATION OF MEDICARE

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam Speaker, on Monday President Bush called the Medicare program old and tired. He said he wants to give seniors better options like those available in the private sector. He said he wants to overhaul Medicare. He wants to overhaul Medicare and privatize Medicare.

The President has every right to push his privatization agenda but not by co-opting an issue like prescription drug coverage, as emotional and important as it is, not by characterizing Medicare as a failed program so that he can justify his goal of privatizing it. Whether it is Social Security privatization or Medicare privatization, it is disingenuous of the administration to portray privatization as improving the system.

The retirement safety net was not put in place because liberals wanted to make the Federal Government bigger, nor should it be dismantled because conservatives want to make the Federal Government smaller. The safety net of Medicare was put in place because the private sector could not make a profit offering health insurance to seniors, so they stopped doing it. It was put in place because the values of this Nation are such that we believe Americans who helped build the Nation's unrivaled prosperity through their working years should not face financial uncertainty and hardship when they retire.

Pooling our resources into the public program we call Medicare is the best way to provide consistent, equitable, reliable health care benefits to our retirees. The stock market and the HMO industry may be good at many things, but alleviating uncertainty and providing health care are not two of them. Now the future of Social Security and Medicare are on the line.

The President says that seniors deserve better options in Medicare; that is why he favors privatization. Is Medicare inferior to the private insurance market? Would seniors be better off with a voucher that helps pay for coverage in an HMO?

Medicare is more reliable than private health plans. Medicare offers more choice than private health plans. Medicare operates more efficiently than private health plans. According to survey after survey, including a recent one from nonpartisan Commonwealth Fund, Medicare far outranks both employer-sponsored and individually purchased private insurance as a trusted source, a trusted source of health coverage. But the administration wants to give seniors more choice and better options in Medicare.

Is it better to have your choice of HMOs than to be able to choose your doctor under Medicare? Is it better to have your choice of HMOs than being able to choose your hospital under Medicare? Is it better to have your choice of HMOs than to be able to choose where any of your health care is delivered, from whomever you want, to the way regular, traditional government-sponsored Medicare fee for service works?

Medicare is a single plan that treats all beneficiaries equally, provides maximum choice and access for patients and doctors. Contrast that with the President's Medicare voucher program envisioned by the administration. Instead of being guaranteed access to needed health care services, seniors would be guaranteed access to a partial voucher for private health insurance.

Medicare guarantees full choice of physicians. Private HMOs advocated by the administration do not. Medicare guarantees full choice of any hospital. HMOs, privatized Medicare; privatized HMOs do not. It appears higher-income seniors could afford this voucher plan

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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